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OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

Rev. JAMES MANNING's

SKETCH

OF THE

LIFE AND WRITINGS

OF THE

Rev. MICAIJAH TOWGOOD.

Price One Shilling and Six Pence.

BRITISH MUSEUM (NATURAL HISTORY)

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SOLD BY
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M.DCC.XCII.

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PREFACE.

THE author of the work, which has ſuggeſted the following obſervations, certainly, did not miſtake, when he modeſtly imagined it probable, that his readers would not be diſpleaſed with his attempt to delineate the life and character of ſo excellent a man as Mr. TOWGOOD. If diſtinguiſhed talents and virtues deſerve to be recorded, in honour of the dead and for the edification of the living, the ſubject of his memoir was evidently entitled to this diſtinction; and Mr. MANNING unqueſtionably merits, and will obtain, the thanks of the benevolent, for raiſing ſo illuſtrious an object to more extenſive notice, and endeavouring to lead men from the view to the imitation of genuine excellence. I chearfully acknowledge myſelf indebted to him, in common with the friends of virtue; and cannot but applaud his efforts (which, I doubt not, will

prove

prove ſucceſsful) to render the effuſions of grateful affection ſubſervient to the intereſts of general utility. Theſe remarks, however, by no means imply an unqualified approbation of every ſentiment advanced in his performance: there are ſeveral poſitions contained in it, which are inconſiſtent with my own views of important truth, and which therefore I have endeavoured to refute. Moſt of theſe are related as the ſentiments of Mr. Towgood, and, conſidered merely as ſuch, their ſuppoſed erroneouſneſs or impropriety cannot certainly be transferred to the writer of his Life. And ſhould the reader actually ſee reaſon to agree in the concluſions here formed concerning theſe opinions, he muſt immediately perceive, that it cannot in any meaſure detract from Mr. Towgood's merit, to admit that he was not perfectly exempt from error. With regard both to thoſe concluſions, and the animadverſions which reſpect the principles and obſervations of the biographer, they will ſcarcely be ſuſpected, I believe, to proceed from any improper feelings; and if I may myſelf be conſidered as competent to determine, I can ſafely declare,

declare, that they are expoſed to public notice from a ſincere and ardent love of truth. I aim not at originality, but at juſtneſs of remark; and if I only ſet in a different light, or repeat in different language, what has been already often advanced, it will probably be admitted in juſtification, that circumſtances of a local or temporary nature often ſupply peculiar advantages for communication; and that, when attention is already excited to particular ſubjects, a valuable opportunity is, almoſt univerſally, preſented for eradicating errors which have been long maintained, and impreſſing truths which have been long diſcovered. I am moſt perfectly convinced, that temperate oppoſition and diſcuſſion cannot poſſibly, on the whole, be otherwiſe than highly ſerviceable; and though the number of thoſe who will queſtion the truth or importance of my obſervations may poſſibly be great, yet whatever number may ſuppoſe me to err, I hope none will have reaſon to think me uncandid.

CONTENTS.

CONTENTS.

PAGE

SECT. I.—*ON the authority of names,* - - 9

SECT. II.—*On the importance of just views of christianity, and the liberty of the pulpit,* - - 13

SECT. III.—*On the force and authority of the gospel precepts,* - - - - - - 26

SECT. IV.—*On the worship of Christ,* - - 34

SECT. V.—*On the parable of the master of the vineyard,* - - - - - - 41

SECT. VI.—*On the death of Christ,* - - 49

SECT. VII.—*On the duration of future punishment,* 55

SECT. VIII.—*Miscellaneous observations,* - - 61

26 MA 66

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

Rev. JAMES MANNING's SKETCH

OF THE

LIFE OF THE Rev. MICAIJAH TOWGOOD.

SECT. I.

On the authority of names.

SO apt are mankind to be influenced, in the admiſſion or continuance of doctrines, by the authority of names, that it is almoſt impoſſible too frequently to remind them of the danger of this confidence, and to inculcate that manly independence which muſt be aimed at by the diſpaſſionate inquirer after truth. While it is acknowledged, that all are, probably, more or leſs affected by this prejudice in favour of opinions, from their having been adopted by men of eminent abilities and integrity, it will ſcarcely be allowed to be a prejudice which we are bound to cheriſh, or, indeed, which it is not incumbent upon us to endeavour totally to extirpate.

For nothing is more evident, than that we cannot infer the truth of doctrines from the talents or merits of thoſe by whom they are maintained. The groſſeſt abſurdities and extravagancies have been embraced by men of extraordinary genius, and the moſt oppoſite notions have been ſupported by characters equally reſpectable in worth and ability. The advocates of different ſyſtems may draw out, in battle-array, their hoſts of illuſtrious champions, and oppoſe each other with a whole cloud of witneſſes; but ſuch a practice, though it may indeed bewilder and obſcure the underſtanding, can furniſh no reaſon that ought to convince, no evidence calculated to enlighten. If truth be, in reality, the object of our ardent purſuit, we ſhall endeavour, when examining any opinion, to view it ſimply in its own merits, and to diſengage ourſelves from the conſideration, by whom it has been introduced, or patronized. We ſhall not reject it, becauſe it is advanced by the infidel; nor ſhall we admit it, becauſe it is maintained by the believer. And the circumſtance of any ſentiment being deemed important

portant, even by a long catalogue of thoſe who are eminent for piety and learning, will only be regarded as a motive againſt diſmiſſing it without diligent inveſtigation. As the boundaries of a ſect are, in no caſe, the limits of juſt thinking; as there are none, of whatever party and however ignorant, who do not entertain ſome rational and valuable notions, and none, on the other hand, ſo thoroughly enlightened, as to poſſeſs infallibility, or even to be precluded from actual error; it can, certainly, be no matter of juſt ſurprize, if we diſcover erroneous opinions to be entertained by thoſe who may have adopted the ſame general ſyſtem with ourſelves, and who have gained our admiration for their diſcernment, as well as our eſteem for their moral excellencies. Such diſcoveries, without lowering our ideas of their merit, remind us of the common imperfection of our nature; they confirm us in the neceſſity of being extremely cautious, leſt we transfer, without diligent ſcrutiny, the attachment we entertain for perſons to their principles; and convince us, that, however, we may admire the

talents or virtues of individuals, if we would deſerve the character of impartial inquirers, we muſt always practically remember, that truth reſts on no authority but reaſon. Mr. MANNING does not appear to me to have uniformly paid that attention to theſe ſentiments which they merit. "When we ſee," ſays he*, "ſuch men "as Dr. PRICE and Mr. TOWGOOD receiving theſe "doctrines" (principally the doctrines of Arianiſm) "after long and diſpaſſionate enquiry, "we are, in ſome meaſure, guarded againſt the "ſtrong aſſertions of others, are encouraged to "think they are not ſo manifeſtly repugnant "to reaſon as they apprehend them to be, and "are led to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith "without wavering." The propriety of the obſervations advanced in this ſection would, I think, be allowed, when conſidered merely as preliminary to ſome ſtrictures on the views and opinions of Mr. TOWGOOD, whoſe excellence of heart and underſtanding was evidently not ill calculated to create a prepoſſeſſion for his ſentiments; but it may be ſubmitted to the con-

* Life, p. 144.

ſideration

ſideration of the reader, whether the paſſage juſt quoted from his Life do not furniſh an additional propriety to their introduction.

SECT. II.

On the importance of juſt views of Chriſtianity, and the liberty of the pulpit.

"WOULD to God," ſays Mr. MANNING in his account of Mr. TOWGOOD's public diſcourſes *—"Would to God, that all "the miniſters of religion, like this amiable "preacher, could be induced to drop their diſ- "putes at the ſhrine of piety,—and more fre- "quently and earneſtly to animate their hearers "to the holding a rational and devotional fellow- "ſhip with the Father, and with his ſon, Jeſus "Chriſt." And in another place †, he obſerves, "Mr. TOWGOOD was too well acquainted with the "human mind, to expect to ſucceed by an un- "ſeaſonable and haſty intruſion of his own views

* P. 93, 94. † P. 43.

"of

" of the doctrines of Chriſtianity. The under-
" ſtanding is not to be taken by aſſault, but
" to be won by gentle and gradual approaches."
And he again obſerves, * " Mr. Towgood re-
" gretted the miſtaken zeal, by which many
" of the preſent day are actuated, who ſo pre-
" cipitately embrace and fondly propagate opi-
" nions, which, after long and impartial enquiry,
" he was convinced were as unſcriptural as they
" were uncomfortable."

I know not how far I may be ſuppoſed right, in judging theſe obſervations a ſufficient ground for making ſome remarks on the importance of a miniſter's freely and frequently ſtating from the pulpit what he conceives to be juſt views of Chriſtianity; but, as the paſſages in queſtion appear to me calculated to leave on the mind of the reader impreſſions unfavourable to this free and frequent declaration, I conſider myſelf amply juſtified in endeavouring to vindicate it. As ſtewards, then, of the myſteries of God, or, in other words, as miniſters of the goſpel,

* P. 86.

I have

I have always conſidered it an important part of the office of the public teachers of our religion, to endeavour to exhibit to their hearers its genuine doctrines, as well as to enforce its precepts: nor do I ſee how this is moſt properly and effectually to be performed, without entering upon diſputed ſubjects—without, not merely preſenting their own ſentiments, but alſo impartially and candidly animadverting upon thoſe of others, and thus attempting to diſtinguiſh Chriſtianity from the additions of human preſumption and error. If it be of any conſequence to inculcate Chriſtianity at all, it is evidently of conſequence, that it ſhould be repreſented in its original and pureſt form; and the more clearly mankind are enabled to ſee the reaſonableneſs of its doctrines, the more firmly attached to it, we muſt, I think, ſuppoſe they will become, and the ſtricter attention and obedience we muſt imagine them likely to give to its moral precepts. This ſuppoſition is, in my opinion, confirmed, by conſidering one grand cauſe of infidelity in our own and, particularly, in ſome other countries, in which the abſurdity

of

of the eſtabliſhed forms, and of the common repreſentations of the goſpel, has alienated multitudes from its belief, and thus prepared them for the rejection of its morality. Should it be urged, that, if the latitude here pleaded for in public diſcourſes were admitted, notions in the higheſt degree irrational and abſurd would nevertheleſs be delivered, it muſt undoubtedly be allowed, that this would be the caſe for a time; but it muſt be obſerved, that truth will eventually obtain the advantage; and, though confuſion and perplexity might, for a ſeaſon, take place in the minds of good men, in the conſideration of oppoſing ſyſtems; yet, as examination and diſcuſſion would be promoted, light would in all probability ſoon ſhine out of darkneſs, and the chaos of notions which had occupied their minds would be exchanged for a happy and luminous arrangement of juſt ideas: Or, even tho' juſt and comprehenſive views of Chriſtianity ſhould not be obtained by the preſent generation, in conſequence of adopting this plan of liberal avowal and repreſentation, yet, as it would moſt obviouſly tend to haſten the happy time when

they

they will be entertained—when the diſciples of Jeſus will clearly ſee the truths, and thoroughly feel the power, of his religion—the propriety and expediency of its adoption by miniſters muſt ſtill, I think, be admitted: and their hearers, notwithſtanding any difficulties they may experience in ſettling their own minds, ſhould be both contented and happy to think, that poſterity, at leaſt, will be benefitted by theſe exertions to diſcover and diffuſe the truth.

But I would moreover remark, that an important object of a miniſter's endeavouring, in his public capacity, to ſeparate the goſpel from its corruptions, is not only to prevent chriſtians from becoming infidels, but alſo to induce infidels to become chriſtians. If that be a deſirable ſeaſon (which we are taught to expect with ardour and delight) when all nations ſhall be gathered into one fold, under one ſhepherd and biſhop of ſouls, Jeſus Chriſt, it is certainly incumbent upon us to remove, as far as poſſible, the obſtacles which retard its approach. Now it is a fact, that the diſciples of Mahomet and of

Moſes, as well as the more general and enlightened ſceptic, have almoſt perpetually objected, as an invincible bar to their acceptance of chriſtianity, that it contains doctrines moſt palpably contradictory to common ſenſe and reaſon; ſome of which doctrines, at leaſt, are alſo conſidered by a reſpectable, though comparatively ſmall, number of chriſtians themſelves, as forming no part of divine revelation. This circumſtance, I think, ſhould be ſufficient to induce all chriſtians to wiſh the reaſonableneſs of their religion to be as fully inquired into, and as notoriouſly manifeſted, as poſſible, and, with this view, to allow, in their places of public inſtruction, that liberty of repreſentation here pleaded for. For, though unbelievers of either of theſe claſſes do not frequent thoſe places of religious inſtruction, they would unqueſtionably have intercourſe with thoſe who would imbibe what was there taught; they would know by this communication what was there inculcated; and, from the notions entertained by the general body of chriſtians, they almoſt univerſally form their ſentiments of chriſtianity itſelf. I think

it,

it, therefore, of great importance, that the public teachers of our religion, who have certainly the beſt advantages and opportunities for inquiry, ſhould be permitted freely and candidly to declare what, in their opinion, chriſtianity really is, and what it is not; that they ſhould be encouraged to diveſt the goſpel, as much as they can, of obſcurity, to diſplay its reaſonableneſs, and to diffuſe a ſpirit of rational inveſtigation. Thus, as already obſerved, truth would more generally and ſpeedily prevail. The objections of infidels, drawn from any erroneous and abſurd opinions of the great body of chriſtians, would more rapidly vaniſh; and the earneſt endeavours of the latter, to ſhow that their religion was reaſonable, would have a moſt happy tendency to convince the former that it was credible.

Yet, notwithſtanding the advantages, which, I conceive, would flow, both to thoſe who believe and to thoſe who reject the goſpel, from miniſters thus ſtating what they believe to be its genuine doctrines, and endeavouring to eradicate

what they imagine to be its corruptions, I cannot deny, that every independent ſociety *may* prevent the introduction of any opinions before them, different from thoſe to which they have been accuſtomed. Every ſuch ſociety may, if it pleaſe, ſtipulate with the perſon whom it may chuſe to inculcate the doctrines and duties of religion, "Hitherto you ſhall go, but no farther; and, whatever your own ſentiments of the goſpel may at any time be, you ſhall propoſe none to our conſideration but thoſe which we have long maintained and fondly cheriſhed." But, however unqueſtionable the exiſtence of ſuch a power (for we can hardly call it a right) may be, the exerciſe of it would, I think, be abſolutely wrong; and I ſhould certainly not think very highly of the wiſdom or rectitude, in this inſtance, of any body of chriſtians, who could thus be content to impoſe ſhackles upon their miniſter, and prevent the decent, candid, and liberal exerciſe of the freedom for which I am contending.

If

If it ſhould, after all, be urged, (ſo forcible and inveterate is the power of prejudice) that, inſtead of explicit and frequent declaration, it ſeems preferable for miniſters to advance by ſlow and almoſt imperceptible degrees, to proceed by indirect hint and alluſion, and to be content with theſe meaſures of caution and gradual preparation, till, after a conſiderable courſe of ſervices, they have ingratiated themſelves into the eſteem and confidence of their people, and may have attained that influence, which will enable them to profeſs their own ſentiments, and controvert thoſe of others without offence; I would obſerve, that ſo much attention to prejudice ſeems calculated to expoſe miniſters, in ſome meaſure, to the practice of inſincerity, by almoſt unavoidably leading them to the uſe of ambiguous phraſes and equivocal language. Such, probably, would be the effect of this management with reſpect to miniſters themſelves. As to their people, it would be likely to excite ſuſpicions, among the more intelligent and diſcerning part of them at leaſt, highly unfavourable to their characters, as men of firmneſs and integrity,

integrity, and conſequently injurious to their uſefulneſs. For my own part, I muſt acknowledge, that I ſhould admire and approve the man, who, with the moſt ſtrict and extenſive candour, ſpoke what he conceived to be the word of important truth with all boldneſs, incomparably more than one who doubtfully and darkly intimated his ſentiments, whom I ſuſpected of keeping ſomething always in reſerve, and whom I conſidered as ſhunning to declare what he thought the counſel of God, through the apprehenſion (which I could ſcarcely help thinking rather a ſelfiſh apprehenſion) of offending prejudice.

It is, moreover, a very important objection to this ſlow method of proceeding, that truth materially ſuffers by being ſo obſcurely and partially exhibited. The appearance of reaſonableneſs and utility in a doctrine depends much on its being ſeen at one view in various connections and dependencies; and the ſame poſition, which, when mentioned as an independent and ſolitary truth, would ſeem abſurd

and

and incredible, when ſtated in its juſt variety of relations and evidence, is chearfully allowed its claim to our belief. The ſhortneſs and uncertainty of life, and our ignorance of thoſe who may ſucceed us, may alſo be regarded as furniſhing a powerful motive to the free exertions I am recommending, and a caution againſt forming plans which run far into futurity. In ſhort, to adopt in part the language of a diſtinguiſhed character, I cannot but think, that theſe plans of ſlow and gradual reform almoſt univerſally terminate in little or no reform at all.*

Though

* Mr. TOWGOOD himſelf may, perhaps, be produced by thoſe who deny the Trinitarian doctrine, as an example to ſtrengthen this obſervation. It may be juſtly ſuppoſed, that a majority of the congregation which he ſerved were Arians at the time they made choice of him, becauſe he was reputed to entertain the ſentiments of that ſect. The minority, who were certainly a conſiderable body, were Trinitarians, and continued to be ſo, without much, I apprehend, if any diminution in point of number, to the time of his reſignation, after three and thirty years of ſervice among them. In this long period, however, there was time ſufficient for him, we might ſuppoſe, to ſubvert an opinion, in his judgment, unſcriptural, by the moſt cautious proceſs that the moſt prudent engineer could recommend: and, ſuppoſing him to have practiſed the gradual method of oppoſing error which he approved, the failure of ſucceſs after ſo long a trial, with the advantages of ſo much eloquence and knowledge,

may

Though I have endeavoured, however, to vindicate the propriety of miniſters attempting, by free ſtatement and reaſoning, to extirpate religious prejudices, I am very far from being an advocate, as indeed already intimated, for wantonly and unneceſſarily ſhocking them: and it cannot eſcape our obſervation, that there are ſeveral ways of oppoſing vigorouſly what we conceive to be erroneous. We are, by no means, moſt likely to ſucceed, when we repreſent the followers of any opinion as deſerving on this account the contempt or hatred of their fellow-creatures, or the damnation of the Almighty. Men cannot, ſimply for a difference of ſentiment, eaſily bear the charge of ſtupidity or of impiety, and are more likely

may be conſidered as furniſhing an argument againſt its real utility. It is obſervable, that, in treating political ſubjects from the pulpit, Mr. Towgood ſeems to have forgotten or neglected his own favourite maxim; for it is well known, that, during the late American war, he declared himſelf with a freedom and explicitneſs which gave great offence to ſome of his audience, and induced them to leave the congregation while he was preaching. It is, perhaps, worth adding, that his ſentiments and arguments thus delivered without reſerve, left on the reſt of the ſociety a conviction of the injuſtice of the meaſures which he had been condemning.

to be irritated and diſguſted by it, than to be convinced. But there is another manner of explicitly and firmly oppoſing commonly-received opinions from the pulpit, which, I think, not only ought to give no offence, but is alſo likely to prevent any from being taken, except, perhaps, by thoſe who are indeed extremely weak and irritable, and whoſe cenſure therefore it is almoſt impoſſible by any conduct to avoid. It is a manner which admits of zeal, but not of acrimony; and of openneſs, but not of dogmatiſm; which, in ſhort, blends modeſty with freedom, and unites ardour in the cauſe of truth with the moſt genuine and extenſive charity to mankind. What, in fact, is here recommended, is to transfer a well-known rule of ſocial manners to the caſe before us, to join firmneſs of purpoſe with gentleneſs of execution, or to unite the "ſuaviter in modo" with the "fortiter in re." I cordially agree with Mr. MANNING, in thinking it of the utmoſt conſequence for miniſters to endeavour to animate their hearers with the genuine temper and ſpirit of devotion. Undoubtedly piety, and virtue, and heavenly-

mindedneſs ſhould be the grand topics of public perſuaſion; and I am by no means a friend to the *frequently* delivering of whole diſcourſes on ſubjects which are called doctrinal. But I do conſider it of ſerious importance, that a miniſter ſhould frequently introduce thoſe ſubjects; that he ſhould exert himſelf to enable his people to give a reaſon both for their faith and hope; in ſhort, that he ſhould inſtil knowledge as the guide to virtue, and endeavour to render his hearers, as far as he is able, enlightened as well as practical chriſtians.

SECT. III.

On the force and authority of the goſpel precepts.

IN the narrative of Mr. Towgood's religious ſentiments § we are informed, that he thought Socinianiſm "obſcured in a great degree the glories of the goſpel, and enervated the force and authority of its precepts." With

§ P. 133.

reſpect

reſpect to the former part of this charge againſt what is called Socinianiſm, it may, perhaps, be moſt properly conſidered as a matter of feeling or imagination. What ſome may conſider as genuine glory, others may regard as uſeleſs pomp; what many ſuppoſe to give dignity to the ſcheme of revelation, others would think only loaded it with an incumbrance. It may be remarked, that a ſimilar inferiority, in point of magnificence and ſplendour has been objected by Athanaſians againſt the ſcheme of Arianiſm. The Arian, however, will, probably, conſider the grace of God to be no leſs glorioufly manifeſted upon his own ſcheme, than upon that of Athanaſianiſm; though he may not, like ſome of the advocates of the latter, regard it as diſplayed in a manner "ſo awfully ſtupendous, that Reaſon ſtands aghaſt at it, and Faith herſelf is half confounded!" But it will be neither injurious nor diſgraceful to him impartially to examine, whether there be not yet another ſcheme ſtill leſs ſtupendous, and at the ſame time not leſs glorious, than his own. The revolutions of day and night, of ſummer

and winter, are equally illuſtrious proofs of God's power and providence, and the bleſſings of ſeed-time and harveſt are bleſſings equally important, though they are procured, not by the motion of the whole heavens, but by the ſimpler and eaſier motion of the earth :* and it deſerves to be ſeriouſly conſidered, whether the goſpel do not appear as truly glorious, when we ſuppoſe the pardon of ſin and everlaſting life proclaimed by Jeſus of Nazareth, "a *man* approved of God by ſigns, and wonders, and miracles, which God did by him," to all that repent and are converted, as when we ſuppoſe theſe doctrines to have been preached by the Creator of the world, who was diveſted of unutterable dignity, cloathed with the infirmities of human fleſh, and expoſed, after a painful life, to a moſt ignominious and excruciating death, to atone for the wickedneſs of mankind, or (according to Mr. Towgood's own idea) as a monument of the placability of God. I cannot but obſerve, (though I ſhall again have room for ſimilar obſervations) that, if there be

* No. 1. Vol. II. Comm. and Eſſays, p. 19, 20.

any

any glory in the peculiarities of the latter ſcheme, inſtead of attracting an illuminated admiration, it ſeems more calculated to overwhelm in amazement and obſcurity. And if I ſhould be told, that (like the robe of the Almighty in our ſublime poet) it is "Dark through exceſſive light," I muſt again obſerve, that it would appear to me incomparably more glorious, if it tended rather to enlighten than to confound.

But the latter part of the charge is more definite and important. Before I attempt, however, to refute it, I ſhall juſt remark, that it has been queſtioned, whether Mr. TOWGOOD really did conceive Socinianiſm to enervate the force and authority of the goſpel precepts in general. I have heard, that he has frequently declared, that the principal inconvenience which he thought to ariſe from the Socinian ſcheme, in a moral view, was, that it weakened our obligation to the love of Chriſt. If this latter was his idea, (which the liberality and comprehenſion of his mind would lead me to think more

more likely) Mr. MANNING has not been ſufficiently correct in the account he has given us of his ſentiments; for it makes a very material difference, whether Socinianiſm be conſidered as enervating the force and authority of *all* the precepts of the goſpel, (which we are led from the account in his "Life" to think was Mr. TOWGOOD's opinion) or, whether it be conſidered as only weakening the force of *one*, which, however ill founded,§ was probably, I think, his real ſentiment. Though it is, beyond compariſon, more deſerving of our examination, whether the remark be true or falſe, than whether it were the ſentiment of this venerable character or not, I think it proper to mention the doubt, that Mr. MANNING may be induced to review the evidences of his ſtatement; and if any alteration be neceſſary, I am perfectly ſatisfied he will avail himſelf of the next opportunity to circulate it.

For my own part, I regard the peculiar force and authority of the goſpel precepts, as well as doctrines, to depend, not on the nature or perſon

§ Theol. Rep. vol. vi. p. 99—104, 284—302, 382—406.

perſon of our Lord, but on the evidence of his having been a teacher ſent from God. And, even admitting the pre-exiſtence of Jeſus Chriſt, I do not ſee, that the authority of his precepts can be eſtabliſhed on a more firm foundation, than on the proofs of the divinity of his miſſion. If we ſuppoſe two beings, in the form of men, to appear in this our world, one declaring that he exiſted before his appearance upon earth, the other aſſuming to be no more than a merely human being, endued with an extraordinary ſhare of divine inſpiration, yet both pretending to be appointed by God as inſtructors of the world, and claiming obedience to their inſtructions and belief in their doctrines by an appeal to the actual and notorious exerciſe of miraculous powers, ſhould we not think the claims and pretenſions of both to be juſt? Should we not yield obedience and belief to both, ſolely upon the evidence ſupplied by both of divine interpoſition? Or, in other words, would the admitted pre-exiſtence of the one entitle his poſitive precepts to our obedience, more than thoſe of the other would be entitled to it, whoſe commiſſion

miſſion was allowed and manifeſted to be equally derived from the God of truth? The circumſtance of having pre-exiſted or not would appear to me totally foreign to the queſtion of believing or obeying their declarations as of divine authority, which I ſhould imagine determinable only by the evidence of miracles or prophecy, adduced by their authors in proof of their divinity. This we obſerve to have been the ground on which the prophets of former ages reſted their claim to obedience, and which they were directed to chooſe by God himſelf. Thus we read, Ex. vii. 8, 9. *The Lord ſpake unto Moſes and unto Aaron, ſaying, When Pharaoh ſhall ſpeak unto you, ſaying, ſhew a miracle for you, then thou ſhalt ſay unto Aaron, take thy rod and caſt it before Pharaoh, and it ſhall become a ſerpent.* Likewiſe, 1 Kings xviii. when the prophet Elijah would convince the people and the prieſts of Baal that he was the meſſenger of the only living and true God, that he had acted according to ſupernatural direction, and was entitled to belief and obedienee, he offers up his prayer to the Supreme Being, that he would manifeſt

his

his miraculous power; which was accordingly exhibited in conſuming the ſacrifice, and exhauſting the water with which it was ſurrounded. And, indeed, without enumerating a multitude of other inſtances, we find our Lord himſelf eſtabliſhing his claim to be believed and obeyed on the ſame firm and immoveable foundation. *The words that I ſpeak unto you,** ſays he, John xiv. 10. *I ſpeak not of myſelf, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.* In ſhort, as Socinians confeſſedly admit the evidence to which our Lord himſelf appealed in atteſtation of the truth and divinity of his inſtructions, I truſt it will appear that the obſervation I have been combating is totally groundleſs; and that, if the force and authority of the goſpel precepts can be juſtly ſuppoſed to be enervated by Socinians, they may with equal truth be alledged, never to have been ſufficiently confirmed by Chriſt.

* Our Lord, however, cannot certainly be ſuppoſed, with any propriety, to mean, that every word which he uttered, even on the moſt common and ordinary occaſion, was of divine ſuggeſtion; though this idea ſeems to have been entertained by ſome.

It would appear invidious to endeavour to exalt any one claſs of chriſtians at the expence of others; but I may, without offence, affirm it to be my ſincere opinion, that an impartial obſerver would conſider thoſe who are diſtinguiſhed by the appellations of Unitarians or Socinians, to be by no means inferior to their brethren in a firm belief of the genuine doctrines of the goſpel, or in a practical attachment to its precepts.

SECT. IV.

On the worſhip of Chriſt.

MR. TOWGOOD, we learn,† "thought our Saviour to be a proper object of worſhip,* and conſidered the objections to this worſhip as only a diſpute about words." He diſtinguiſhed

† P. 136.

* On this very material queſtion, we may obſerve, Mr. TOWGOOD totally differed from Doctor PRICE, who declares, in a note (p. 143) to one of his ſermons, "It is an eſſential part of religion with me, to worſhip one God only."

between

between mediatorial and divine worſhip: he obſerved, that there could be no idolatry in returning thanks to a being from whom we had received a benefit; and that, when we talk of the idolatry of worſhipping more perſons than one, we muſt conſider what kind of reſpect we mean to include in the word. Since, however, Mr. Towgood, notwithſtanding his diſtinction between mediatorial and divine worſhip, evidently allowed worſhip in either caſe to include the addreſs of ſupplication and thankſgiving to the object to whom it is preſented, I muſt ſtill conſider the queſtion of the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt as ſomething more than a ſubject of mere verbal diſpute. While I moſt cordially admit, and would inforce, the obligation of chriſtians to cheriſh the ſentiments of grateful and admiring recollection, in return for the ſervices and ſufferings of their benefactor, I conſider him as beyond the reach of their addreſſes, and ſhould think myſelf chargeable, at leaſt, with the groſſeſt abſurdity, in preſenting ſupplications to him, which I at the ſame time ſuppoſed him unable to hear. It will be allowed, that on the

ſuppoſition of Chriſt being the maker and governor of the world, it appears moſt natural to conſider him as the being with whom we have more immediately, and indeed moſt of all, to do; and it would ſeem as reaſonable for mankind to offer up their prayers to ſuch a being, as it is for children to aſk good things of their parents. To uſe in part the language of ſcripture, he would be to us a God, and we might, with the moſt apparent juſtice and duty, devote ourſelves to him as a people. But if this extraordinary ſuppoſition be indeed true, we cannot ſuppreſs our wonder that ſcripture ſhould ſo far vary from the dictates of nature and reaſon, as to forbid this glorious and exalted perſonage being thus worſhipped. For it is not only true, (as Mr. Towgood himſelf acknowledged, at leaſt with reſpect to prayer §) that the ſcripture in no

§ P. 137-8, "As the ſcripture in no inſtance expreſsly required that Chriſt ſhould be addreſſed in prayer, and as many of the ſociety with which Mr. Towgood was connected conſidered all worſhip of Chriſt as improper, though he himſelf thought it defenſible, he did not think it a duty, and very ſeldom, if ever, practiſed it in public; conſidering it as an obligation, to conduct the religious addreſſes of a mixed ſociety in ſuch a manner as would be conformable

no inſtance expreſſly requires Chriſt to be worſhipped—a circumſtance which ſhews that thoſe who engage in ſuch a practice expoſe themſelves to the charge of being wiſe above what is commanded; and of breaking through what, in a caſe of ſuch importance, can hardly be conſidered in any other light than that of a virtual prohibition—but it is equally certain, that the having of other gods beſide Jehovah, the creator of heaven and of earth,† by which we muſt, I think, underſtand (with other things) the preſenting of religious addreſſes to any being *beſide* the Father of univerſal nature, though confeſſedly

formable to the ſentiments of all his fellow-worſhippers." If theſe were the genuine ſentiments of Mr. TOWGOOD during the whole time of his reſidence at Exeter, it will appear ſomewhat ſurpriſing, that he ſhould have made a collection of pſalms and hymns for the uſe of his congregations in that place (and which is ſtill uſed by theſe ſocieties), abounding in direct addreſſes to Jeſus Chriſt, and in which he knew that many of them could not by any means join. See Pſ. 119; Hymns 162, 180, 182, 201, 206, 207, 237, 258, 268, 275, &c. of the collection printed by WILLIAM GRIGG, Exeter. Perhaps, however, at the time of forming this collection, Mr. TOWGOOD's ſentiments might be different.

† See Gen. i. 1. Iſaiah xiv. 12. and particularly xliv. 24. Acts xiv. 15. xvii. 34. Rev. xxiv. 11. and an almoſt innumerable multitude of paſſages which deſcribe creation in general and in its parts, as the immediate work of Jehovah.

inferior

inferior to him, is expreſſly forbidden, even in the firſt of thoſe commandments, which were written by the finger of God himſelf. And in the New Teſtament, where this divine prohibition is again inforced with the utmoſt ſolemnity, we moreover perceive the preſenting of our requeſts and ſupplications to Chriſt to be directly forbidden by our Lord himſelf, when he obſerves to his diſciples, John xvi. 23. *In that day* (after my departure) *ye ſhall aſk me nothing—whatſoever ye ſhall aſk the Father in my name, that he will give you.*

Indeed I cannot help regarding the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt, whether it be called mediatorial or divine, and whether it expreſs a reſpect equal or inferior to that paid to the Father, while it includes any immediate addreſs to him, or any thing more than grateful, affectionate, and admiring ſentiments of an abſent friend, to be ſtrictly and properly idolatrous. It appears to me a palpable encroachment on the prerogative of that God, who has declared that he will not give his glory to another, one of whoſe cha-

racteriſtics

racteriſtics in ſcripture is, that he heareth and anſwereth prayer, to whom alone our Lord prayed, when in this our world, moſt fervently and frequently, and to whom alone he has taught us to pray, as to our Father who is in heaven.

Proteſtants, I believe, never heſitate to call the members of the church of Rome idolatrous, for invoking the ſuppoſed ſpirits of dead men, though undoubtedly the reſpect with which they bow before the ſhrines of their ſaints is far inferior to that with which they approach the throne of the Almighty—yet, ſince we conſider them as attaching a very unreaſonable and unſcriptural reſpect to the former, as ſoliciting of them aſſiſtance and protection, when they cannot beſtow that aſſiſtance, nor hear thoſe ſolicitations —in ſhort, as exalting them into a ſpecies of divinities, and, by the attention and reverence paid to them, infringing on the honours of the Supreme Being—we think ourſelves clearly juſtified in applying to them the charge of idolatry. Nor are we induced to retract the charge, by their alledging, that they pay no more reſpect

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and reverence to any being, than that to which they ſuppoſe it juſtly entitled; ſince, were this ſufficient to vindicate from the imputation, it would be impoſſible to prove the exiſtence of any ſuch thing as idolatry at all. I cannot forbear adding, that the ſame reaſons, which juſtify Proteſtants in the application of the term idolatrous to the Popiſh worſhippers of dead men (reaſons, which, in fact, may, perhaps, be conſidered as amounting to this, that Proteſtants ſeriouſly think ſuch worſhip idolatrous), will equally vindicate Unitarians in adopting the ſame language with regard to the Proteſtant worſhippers of Jeſus Chriſt. The latter will, undoubtedly, diſclaim the imputation with as much firmneſs and honeſty as the Catholic invoker of ſaints; but while Unitarians are convinced, that religious addreſſes to any other being than the Father are inconſiſtent with the honours due to him, and a violation of the injunction expreſſly ſanctioned by our Lord himſelf, "Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve," they are moſt certainly defenſible in the application of the charge of idolatry

latry to all who admit the propriety and practice of ſuch addreſſes.

Unitarians, however, I am ſatisfied, wiſh it to be carefully remembered, that idolatry is by no means ſynonimous with impiety. The latter is univerſally, in all caſes and circumſtances, moſt evidently criminal, while the former may be, and in many caſes they doubt not really is, perfectly innocent in the idolater himſelf, though pernicious in its conſequences, and is to be deemed cenſurable in *any one* only in proportion to his capacities, of every kind, for inquiry and better information.

SECT. V.

On the parable of the maſter of the vineyard.

AS an evidence of the ability with which Mr. Towgood defended his opinions at the advanced age of eighty-ſeven years, Mr. Manning adduces his obſervations * on this

* P. 134.

beautiful and ſtriking parable, wherein he aſſerts, that, "if followed into all its juſt conſequences, it concludes moſt ſtrongly againſt the notion of the mere humanity of our Lord;" and that "the very ſtructure, and beauty, and force of the parable, moſt plainly repreſents the ſon to be a perſon of ſuperior rank, and dignity, and birth to the ſervants who were before ſent; elſe, Why ſhould the father ſay, *They will reverence my ſon?* or, Why did the villains ſay, *This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance ſhall be ours?*" I do not, I confeſs, ſee it at all requiſite to imagine, that, becauſe the laſt meſſenger, whom the houſholder ſent to his faithleſs huſbandmen, was his ſon and heir, our Lord was a being of pre-exiſtent glory and dignity, or even that he was diſtinguiſhed from the prophets, who preceded him, by peculiar and ineffable generation. The perſon, who is univerſally allowed to be repreſented by the ſon, of the maſter of the vineyard, was, indeed, our Lord himſelf, who was alſo called the Son of God; but his being ſo denominated (as Dr. PRICE himſelf moſt juſtly obſerves) by no means implies

implies, that he had enjoyed any exiſtence previouſly to his entrance upon our world. We perceive the Jews, who certainly expected a Saviour merely human, to have applied this denomination very commonly to the Meſſiah, inſomuch that Meſſiah and Son of God were equivalent expreſſions to denote the ſame glorious deliverer. The title in queſtion appears to have been given to Chriſt principally, as he was to convey a moſt important meſſage of God's will to the human race, and on account of his reſurrection, whereby *he was declared to be the Son of God with power*, and *the firſt-begotten from the dead*. But though this appellation does not imply any natural ſuperiority, yet, as it was actually beſtowed on Chriſt in diſtinction from former ſervants and prophets, this circumſtance renders the correſpondence between the fictitious ſon of the houſholder and Jeſus Chriſt the ſon of God, whom he repreſented, quite ſufficiently exact and ſtriking on the ſuppoſition of our Lord's proper humanity.

For my own part (whatever might be Mr. Towgood's opinion) I am ſatisfied, that the ſtructure, beauty, and force of the parable will by no means loſe their juſtneſs or excellence, if we ſuppoſe the reference made, not to the natural or perſonal dignity of the meſſenger who is to be underſtood by the ſon, but to his official dignity, which is to be eſtimated by the commiſſion he bore and the powers with which he was inveſted. Let us, with a view of illuſtration, imagine, for a moment, the inhabitants of a particular diſtrict in an extenſive empire to have rebelled and taken up arms againſt a monarch, whoſe dominion was eſtabliſhed by law, and who governed his ſubjects with wiſdom and tenderneſs. Let us conceive this prince to have attempted, by various peaceful and conciliating meſſages, to bring back this refractory people to obedience. After numerous meaſures, both of paternal reproof and invitation, had been treated by them with contempt, and the meſſengers of them had been, ſome dangerouſly wounded, and others actually torn to pieces by theſe infatuated people, let us

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ſuppoſe him to fix upon a perſon, on whom he he could rely with the moſt perfect confidence, and who was well qualified for the employment, to convey to his diſaffected ſubjects, with the greateſt dignity and ſolemnity, a final meſſage, declaring, that, if they returned to obedience, they ſhould immediately be liberated from ſome apparent grievances, on which they had laid great ſtreſs, and, moreover, that they ſhould be entitled to new and invaluable privileges. Let us once more imagine, that ſome intereſted leaders conſulted together on the arrival of this meſſenger, and, having juſt reaſon to imagine that the government of the province would be given up to him if he ſucceeded in his commiſſion, reſolved to diſpatch this confidential and important miniſter, and to retain the power in their own hands. Theſe ſuppoſitions will, I think, ſatisfactorily evince to an attentive reader, who may eaſily apply them to the purpoſe for which they are propoſed, that there is not the leaſt neceſſity for having recourſe to the doctrine of our Lord's pre-exiſtence, or, indeed, of his having been begotten by any extraordi-

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nary mode of generation, to make out the juſtneſs and pertinence of the compariſon he deſigned to inſtitute between himſelf and the ſon of the maſter of the vineyard. How natural was it for the monarch to think his rebellious ſubjects in queſtion would reverence this laſt miniſter of his will, who was, by ſuch important characters of office, diſtinguiſhed from the former? And how eaſily may we account for the endeavours of an intereſted and violent cabal to retain, even by the moſt deteſtable means, the influence they had uſurped, and of which the ſucceſs of this meſſenger would have totally deprived them? The ſuppoſitions above laid down will alſo, I hope, furniſh a ſatisfactory anſwer to the queſtion which Mr. Towgood propoſes—Whence is it, that a courſe of 1700 years of much ſorer captivity than that of Babylon, has not expiated the crime of killing the ſon, but becauſe the ſon was a perſon of incomparably ſuperior rank and birth to any of the ancient prophets? ‡ Whence, I would aſk in turn, (admitting that the preſent diſper-

‡ P. 135.

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ſion of the Jews is intended ſolely to expiate the crime of killing the ſon*) whence, but becauſe they rejected and murdered the meſ-

* The long continued diſperſion and affliction of the Jews may, perhaps, be conſidered as ariſing, not ſo much from the greater enormity of this crime, than that of any other we find them to have committed in the courſe of their hiſtory, though it was undoubtedly very great and atrocious, as from their remaining impenitent, or from their not being convinced that their anceſtors were guilty of a heinous crime in putting the Meſſiah to death. When they ſhall mourn for that dreadful infatuation, which impelled their forefathers to crucify the moſt important meſſenger, and reject the moſt valuable gift of God to man, and which has led *them* to give their own ſanction to the guilt of their anceſtors, the divine favour will unqueſtionably be reſtored to them. It appears, that they have always been puniſhed for a longer or ſhorter time, as they were ſooner or later convinced of their errors, and brought to repent of their tranſgreſſions; and if ſeventy years' captivity in Babylon had not made them ſenſible of the guilt of idolatry, we cannot doubt but it would have been prolonged to the period in which this ſalutary and intended effect would actually have been accompliſhed. The degraded and vagrant ſtate of the ſeed of Abraham muſt be regarded as anſwering a moſt uſeful purpoſe, by keeping alive, in various remote and unenlightened regions, the grand doctrine of the divine Unity; and likewiſe with reſpect to the evidences of chriſtianity, particularly as it ſhews, that our holy religion was not introduced and ſupported by colluſion and intereſt; and when in the courſe of divine providence they ſhall be led to embrace the goſpel, this will be a fact ſo ſtriking, that it cannot fail of making the moſt powerful and uſeful impreſſion upon unbelieving nations, which they will alſo, moſt probably, in other reſpects, be peculiarly inſtrumental in converting to the pure and genuine doctrines of our faith. *If the caſting off of them* (the Jews) *be the reconciling of the world, what ſhall the receiving of them be but life from the dead.* Rom. xi. 15.

ſenger

ſenger whom God had ſent, not only as a light to lighten the Gentiles, but alſo for the glory of his people Iſrael, whoſe miſſion was incomparably more important and extenſive than that of former prophets, the evidences of whoſe authority were at leaſt equally convincing, and whoſe communications from a God of all long-ſuffering and goodneſs were infinitely more valuable. It ſhould be obſerved alſo, that as the laſt perſon ſent by the maſter of the vineyard to his ſervants was of the ſame ſpecies with former meſſengers, however diſtinguiſhed from them by influence and authority, ſo the Jews would not by any means be led to infer from this parable, that the meſſenger of the Divine Being alluded to was of a different ſpecies from thoſe who had preceded him, but merely that he was diſtinguiſhed by higher powers.

I ſhall juſt remark as a general rule, which will be ſerviceable in the ſtudy of ſcripture, (but not from an apprehenſion that the foregoing illuſtration of the parable wants the aid of ſuch remark,

remark, or that Mr. Towgood's inference from the parable muſt otherwiſe be admitted) that we ought to be extremely cautious of inferring doctrines from parables. In theſe repreſentations, which are intended as general illuſtrations or ſhadowy deſcriptions of important truth, we cannot reaſonably expect, that every part of the fiction ſhould have a correſpondent reality, nor that thoſe parts which actually have correſponding objects, ſhould always have them in every particular circumſtance analogous.

SECT. VI.

On the death of Chriſt.

WITH reſpect to the death of Chriſt, both Mr. Towgood and Mr. Manning appear to have rejected the proper doctrine of atonement. The former * conſidered the ſufferings and death of Chriſt, not as the moving cauſe of God's being propitious, but as the

* Grounds of Faith, p. 31.

manner in which he was pleaſed to ſhew himſelf ſo, and as a ſtanding memorial of his being ſo. The latter § regards the death of Chriſt, not as a matter which unrelenting juſtice required as an oblation, but as a wiſe expedient to ſupport moral government, to diſplay the evil and demerit of ſin, and to incite to humility and repentance. I cannot help thinking, that, if a ſenſible man, not previouſly attached to any ſet of ſentiments on the ſubject, were to conſider the ſcheme of theſe gentlemen in its connection with other parts of their ſyſtem (laying aſide the evidence of ſcripture for or againſt it) it would by no means attract his admiration for its wiſdom and ſimplicity. There is ſomething ſo very extraordinary in ſuppoſing the Deity to have appointed the maker of the world, a being poſſeſſed of the moſt diſtinguiſhed moral and intellectual endowments of inconceivable dignity and glory, to diveſt himſelf, partly or totally, in ſome ineffable manner, of his ſuperangelic nature, and in the form of mortal man to ſubmit to the actual infirmities of humanity, and at

§ Life of Mr. Towgood, p. 142.

length

length to expire in agony upon the croſs as a memorial of God's being propitious, or as an expedient to ſupport moral government, that its peculiar propriety ſeems by no means to flaſh with irreſiſtible conviction on the mind, but rather to be abſolutely beyond our comprehenſion. We cannot but inquire, why this inconceivably glorious being is thus expoſed to pain and degradation becauſe others have offended—or to convince or remind us of the divine placability, a doctrine ſo congenial to the human heart, that we cannot conceive any other evidence requiſite to eſtabliſh its abſolute certainty than the declaration of a teacher manifeſtly ſent of God? And if it ſhould be obſerved, that for all his ſufferings this illuſtrious being is moſt amply rewarded and exalted, there is ſtill room to aſk, What peculiar propriety is diſcoverable in the appointment of his ſufferings as an evidence or memorial of the divine propitiouſneſs? or, What peculiar wiſdom is perceivable in *this* expedient for the ſupport of moral government, that, as mankind were chargeable with flagrant guilt and diſobedience, an innocent and highly-diſtin-

guiſhed being ſhould ſuffer diſtreſs, and pain, and death, and that for theſe ſufferings he ſhould be moſt munificently rewarded and exalted? A ſupport of government which appears to amount to this—that thoſe who were really criminal, were not in the ſmalleſt degree puniſhed for the guilt committed; and that an inexpreſſibly glorious and excellent being (notwithſtanding great pain and inconvenience) was actually and extremely benefitted by it.§ Theſe,

§ Were the father of a numerous family, the greater part of whoſe children had acted in a manner extremely diſobedient and culpable, to puniſh with rigour one who had always approved himſelf a dutiful ſon, and had performed his father's will on every occaſion with alacrity and ardour, this meaſure would ſcarcely be conſidered by us as a juſt and beautifnl evidence of the parent's placability, or as a very wiſe expedient to ſupport his authority, and convince the undutiful part of his offspring of their guilt and error: nor would the father's conferring a large and extraordinary reward on his obedient ſon (however proper this would be) tend to reconcile his extraordinary conduct with our views of wiſdom or common ſenſe. But if we ſuppoſe the father of ſuch a family to employ the dutiful ſon in remonſtrating with the diſobedient, in conveying to them meſſages of tender reproof and moſt ſalutary inſtruction, and alſo of threatening if they continued obſtinate in their tranſgreſſions; and after he had been extremely abuſed and injured by his brethren—after he had been made to exhibit by them a noble inſtance of ſuffering, in addition to his active virtue—to beſtow upon him the moſt ample reward his circumſtances would ſupply; this would appear a mode of proceeding worthy of a wiſe and affectionate parent, and adapted to produce its deſired effect, in leading the guilty to thoughtfulneſs and repentance.

and

and other moſt material difficulties, muſt, it ſeems to me, be almoſt unavoidably ſuggeſted by reaſon on the ſcheme here combated: and I cannot forbear inquiring, whether the death of Chriſt do not appear by far better explicable and more ſuitable to our views of wiſdom and propriety on the ſcheme of Socinianiſm? which eſtabliſhes the ſupport of moral government, afforded by chriſtianity, on the firm expectation it excites of reward and puniſhment; which ſuppoſes the placability of God to be ſufficiently and moſt admirably manifeſted in the ſure promiſe of pardon and everlaſting life, upon ſincere and permanent repentance; and which regards the public and notorious death of Jeſus of Nazareth, his human meſſenger and prophet, as furniſhing a moſt important teſtimony and ſeal to the truth of his religion, and as neceſſary to ſupply the moſt convincing evidence of his reſurrection from the grave, by which he might exhibit at once a proof and pattern of ours. Simplicity and wiſdom muſt, I think, be allowed to be, at leaſt, far more obvious in this ſcheme than in the other. And if it ſhould be

ſaid

ſaid by any, that it is not ſurpriſing creatures, ſo low as man in the ſcale of intelligence, ſhould be unable to comprehend the fitneſs of the divine counſels and operations—it may be anſwered, that as in general the wiſdom of God is moſt conſpicuouſly manifeſted in the peculiar tendencies of means to accompliſh ends in the works of nature, ſo it is not unnatural to expect, that ſuch tendencies would be equally at leaſt diſplayed in the grand appointments of revelation. It may be added, that the greater the difficulty of comprehending the object propoſed by divine wiſdom in any particular diſpenſation is, the leſs ſuch a diſpenſation is fitted to produce any clear and deciſive practical effect. But I would moreover obſerve, that when two ſchemes are propoſed to ſenſible men as of divine authority, the propriety of one of which is clearly evident, while that of the other is obſcure, and, in a great meaſure, if not totally, beyond their comprehenſion, they will moſt certainly, if they admit either, give a decided preference to the former, on the ſuppoſition that the poſitive evidence adduced in ſupport of the

one-

one and the other is equal. This ſuppoſed equality, however, of poſitive or external evidence, is, I am perfectly convinced, in the preſent caſe, by no means the fact; and, were it expedient, I would endeavour to prove, that the views I have adopted and above advanced on the ſubject under conſideration, are not only moſt conformable to the dictates of reaſon, but alſo to the genuine repreſentations of ſcripture.

SECT. VII.

On the duration of future puniſhment.

IN a profeſſed narrative of Mr. Towgood's ſentiments on ſubjects of religious inquiry, it was not unnatural to expect a ſtatement of his opinion on this important queſtion. In this, however, we are wholly diſappointed. But, whether the omiſſion were unintentional, or whether Mr. Manning apprehended the ſtatement would introduce a diſcuſſion calculated to relax the obligations of morality, it is a deficiency

ciency, which it appears to me there can be no danger in carefully ſupplying. Though I reject the commonly-received opinion, I ſtill imagine the goſpel to afford ſufficiently powerful ſanctions of virtue to all who would act conformably to the dictates of genuine reaſon and intereſt: nor do I conceive it neceſſary or deſirable, that any individual doctrine of our holy religion ſhould be kept in obſcurity, or that the impartial and open repreſentation of it, in its proper connection, can be other than beneficial. With theſe views I feel myſelf happy in being able to declare,* that Mr. Towgood was a great admirer of the celebrated work of Dr. Chauncy,† on the doctrine of a final reſtitution; and, though I do not know that his views on this particular ſubject coincided with thoſe of that reſpectable author, I can ſafely aſſert, that he regarded with

* Should it be objected, that the bare declarations of an anonymous writer are not intitled to public confidence, it is, perhaps, ſufficient to obſerve, that they are to be judged of by circumſtances; and that in thoſe caſes in which (as in the preſent inſtance) if they were falſe, their falſhood muſt be inſtantly detected, there can be little or no danger in admitting them.

† With whom he correſponded. See ſome part of the Sketch.

horror

horror the doctrine of what is commonly called the eternity of hell-torments, as a doctrine totally irreconcilable with the benevolence and juſtice of God, and which, if true, therefore, he could not help conſidering as a moſt unhappy blot in the divine adminiſtration.

Convinced as I am that the general adoption of this tremendous doctrine by chriſtians has been productive of the moſt pernicious and deplorable conſequences, by repreſenting the Supreme Being as an almighty and relentleſs tyrant, by inſpiring many a pious character with terror and deſpondence, and by tending to create or confirm infidelity in multitudes, I cannot but moſt ardently wiſh its credibility to be ſeriouſly and freely inveſtigated; and am induced to obſerve, with this view, that it appears totally inconſiſtent with all our ideas of natural equity, with all thoſe ſentiments which reaſon teaches us to form of the juſt proportion between guilt and puniſhment. I would appeal to the judgment of the moſt ignorant and the moſt enlightened, on no ordinary inſtance of iniquity,

and inquire, whether even the wretch, who, if ſuch a caſe be poſſible, has filled up the meaſure of threeſcore years and ten with the moſt active and abandoned wickedneſs, can really be ſuppoſed to merit the infliction of exquiſite torture, or of any thing properly termed miſery, throughout a duration, in compariſon with which the whole of time is no more than a ſingle drop to the ocean, or an inviſible point to infinite ſpace? But it is not contended, that this doctrine is the dictate of reaſon, but the diſcovery of revelation, in which we are bound to acquieſce with all humility. And if it be indeed a doctrine of revelation, it is certainly incumbent upon us to admit it, however oppoſite to thoſe amiable and glorious, but not abſolutely demonſtrable, ſentiments of the Deity, which are inculcated by the voice of nature; and we muſt be content to adore the almighty power of a God, whoſe juſtice we cannot comprehend. But in proportion to the deviation of any doctrine, alledged to be of divine authority, from our moſt reaſonable, though not demonſtrably true, ideas, the evidence of its

ſupernatural

ſupernatural communication muſt certainly be more ample and convincing; and in the preſent caſe, the deviation being from one extremity of the diameter to the other, I conceive it eſſential, that it ſhould be attended by teſtimony incomparably ſuperior to what can actually be exhibited, and not reſting on a very few paſſages highly obſcure or figurative, doubtfully explained, or, perhaps, falſely tranſlated from a loſt original,* as is really the fact, but on repeated and moſt explicit declarations, accompanied by the moſt incontrovertible, and, I had almoſt ſaid, the moſt miraculous evidence. Nor let it be imagined, that morality is deprived of any important fence by the rejection

* As Matt. xxv. 46. is, I believe, the bulwark of the advocates of this opinion, I ſhall juſt obſerve, that the Greek goſpel of Matthew is ſuppoſed by Grotius, and a conſiderable number of learned men, both from internal and more direct teſtimony, to be the verſion of a Hebrew original, in which, therefore, the tranſlator may have committed ſlight inaccuracies; that the Greek paſſage in queſtion, however, will very eaſily and properly admit of a very different interpretation; and that, if underſtood in its uſual acceptation, it is expreſsly contradicted by an aſſertion (taken in its ſtrictly literal ſenſe) of the apoſtle Paul, who declares, that "the wicked will be puniſhed with everlaſting deſtruction from the preſence of the Lord."

of a notion ſo degrading, according to all our reaſonable ſentiments of the Divine Being, ſo alarming to many a fearful chriſtian, and ſo well calculated to excite the ridicule, or rather, indeed, the ſerious indignation of the infidel. To me, morality appears, in conſequence of this rejection, more ſecure. The full expectation of receiving an adequate puniſhment for offences is, I think, adapted to have more effect in deterring men from them, than doubt concerning the reality of a puniſhment infinitely more painful; for this doubt on the ſubject is, I believe, generally the amount of bad, and, perhaps, I might add, of good, men's faith. And let it be moſt carefully and ſeriouſly remembered, that it does not by any means follow, if I may be allowed the ſingularity of the expreſſion, that becauſe God will not be unjuſt, therefore he will not be juſt; or, in other words, it does not follow, that becauſe he will not inflict endleſs puniſhment for finite crimes, therefore he will inflict no puniſhment at all. While ſin exiſts, we have no reaſon to queſtion but it will be attended with miſery. And though we know

know not exactly in what the puniſhment of the wicked will conſiſt in a future world, or how long it will endure, we have ſufficient ground to conclude, that it will be indeed durable and dreadful: nor is it poſſible for any juſtly to complain, that men are deſtitute of a moſt animating motive, and moſt ſolid ſupport of a good life, while they retain a firm belief in that moſt ſolemn declaration of our Lord, that "all who are in their graves ſhall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and ſhall come forth; they that have done good to the reſurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the reſurrection of condemnation."

SECT. VIII.

Miſcellaneous obſervations.

DISSENTING as I do from the eſtabliſhed religion of this country, and fully convinced as I am that the Diſſenters have approved themſelves, at leaſt equally with any other

other body of ſubjects, the advocates of civil as well as of religious liberty, the firm friends of the Houſe of Hanover, and the ſtrenuous ſupporters of the conſtitution, I cannot but applaud the zeal of Mr. MANNING in endeavouring ‡ to vindicate his brethren from the reproach of civil diſaffection. His ſtatement, however, of their ideas on the Engliſh government is, I think, capable of an alteration, which, though certainly not eſſential to the proof of his poſition, would, perhaps, tend, in ſome meaſure, to confirm it. He obſerves, that the Diſſenters regard with veneration the weight given to the people at large by the voice of the Houſe of Commons. But there are ſeveral circumſtances which prevent the more enlightened part of the Diſſenters, at leaſt, from regarding the actual influence of their repreſentatives with any very peculiar degree of veneration; and, as an attachment to the theory of the conſtitution may perfectly unite with a deteſtation of its perverſion in practice, I could wiſh the Diſſenters, in whom, if I do not

‡ P. 34, &c.

much

much miſtake, this union really exiſts, not to be mentioned for their eſteem of the one, without being noticed at the ſame time for their abhorrence of the other; eſpecially, at a period, when the ſubject of general diſcuſſion, and the object of the moſt wiſe and moderate men's exertions, is a practical conformity to conſtitutional principles, I think it of importance to be obſerved, that, while the Diſſenters venerate the weight given to the people in the voice of their repreſentatives by the ſpirit of the conſtitution, they view with indignation the extent and progreſs of that political corruption, which, by a ſilent operation, tends to convert the appointed guardians of freedom into the miniſters of oppreſſion and ſlavery.

Mr. Towgood juſtly objected to the method of admitting members to the Lord's ſupper by public examination, which was practiſed when he firſt went to reſide at Exeter.* But it may, I think, very properly be queſtioned, whether

* P. 46.

that

that be perfectly free from exception which he ſubſtituted in its room, and which was the miniſter's converſing privately with the candidate, and inquiring into his knowledge of the nature and deſign of this ordinance, and into the ſincerity and uprightneſs of his views in deſiring to join in it. It ſeems, at leaſt, a deviation from the maxim he had himſelf laid down,† that a chriſtian life was a very ſufficient rule of admiſſion to communion. And it is rather extraordinary, that, while he entertained this opinion, he ſhould have recourſe to a private examination, which, had he been perfectly conſiſtent, he muſt, I think, have imagined equally unneceſſary and unſcriptural with a public one. The apoſtle Paul does, indeed, we obſerve, direct a man to examine himſelf, but he does not authoriſe another to examine him; and general exhortations and directions from the miniſter appear to me amply ſufficient.

It is with conſiderable pain that I reflect on the miſconceptions entertained concerning the

† P. 46.

ſimple

ſimple commemorative inſtitution of our Lord's ſupper, even by thoſe who have renounced all connection with the church of Rome, and by thoſe who have moreover diſſented from national eſtabliſhments. The awful forms, examinations, and diſcipline, reſpecting this ordinance, which are ſtill retained by many ſocieties, I cannot but conſider as remnants of the myſticiſm of darker ages, and as tending to keep alive the pernicious ideas of ſome peculiar ſanctity, and ſome extraordinary, however indefinable, influence. It is certainly high time for chriſtians to ſimplify their ideas and practices with regard to this inſtitution, by recurring to the circumſtances and only profeſſed deſign of its appointment, and to haſten the period when the good will be no longer reſtrained from it by terror, nor the wicked tempted to it by hope.

Mr. Towgood, we find, ‡ was a ſtrenuous advocate for the expediency and the neceſſity of ordination. So far was he from conſidering

‡ P. 48.

it as an impoſition on the conſcience to inſiſt upon it, that he was rather inclined to think thoſe guilty of impoſition, who intruded themſelves upon the public without a compliance with this practice. The circumſtance, which led him to urge it as of indiſpenſible importance, was its being a ſcriptural rite and an apoſtolic practice. But it is certain, that the mere practice and appointment of apoſtles are by no means univerſally conſidered of perpetual obligation, even by thoſe perſons who thus vindicate the neceſſity of ordination. I do not imagine, that Mr. Towgood himſelf complied with the expreſs injunction of the apoſtles in the ceremony of anointing the ſick, or in the preſcribed form of chriſtian ſalutation; and, I muſt declare, I ſee no greater reaſon for imagining the impoſition of hands, or the general practice of miniſterial ordination, to be obligatory on chriſtians now, any more than thoſe clear and explicit injunctions above mentioned, which are nevertheleſs, I believe univerſally, and in my opinion juſtly, deemed by Proteſtants to be in the preſent age of no authority. Nor do I ſee

that

that this practice is well calculated to prevent the intruſion of ignorant and unworthy men into religious offices; ſince it is a fact, that, notwithſtanding this ſuppoſed reſtraint, multitudes, who are by no means qualified for theſe offices, are eaſily admitted and ordained to them: and, in my opinion, the only proper, though not always effectual, means of preventing ſuch intruſion, are, the piety and good ſenſe of chriſtian aſſemblies.

Though I have no objection to allow, that ſome religious ſolemnity may be adapted to impreſs the mind of a perſon entering upon the miniſtry with a ſenſe of the importance of the charge, I do not think the impoſition of hands, or the particular confeſſion of faith, expedient for this purpoſe. And the object in view might, perhaps, be obtained far more unexceptionably, without the collection of a numerous aſſembly of miniſters, by a diſcourſe delivered, on the uſual day of public devotion and inſtruction, by ſome learned and venerable character, containing advice both to the miniſter and people,

and by a ſerious and fervent recommendation of both to the bleſſing of the Almighty. But, however this may be, ſurely thoſe who think, as I do myſelf, that the uſual practice of ordination is not only deſtitute of poſitive obligation, but alſo that it tends rather to cheriſh ſuperſtition than to promote genuine piety and virtue, are more than excuſable in refuſing to ſanction it by their compliance. And it appears to me perfectly clear, that every man who, by the qualifications of ſound knowledge and practical chriſtianity, is capable of becoming an inſtructor of our holy religion and a diſpenſer of its ordinances, needs no farther title to act in theſe capacities than he derives from the choice of a ſociety, and can no more be deemed guilty of impoſition than one who is thus called to be a public inſtructor in morals or philoſophy. ‡

THE

‡ See a pamphlet, entitled, "A Blow at the Root of all Prieſtly Claims," in which the pious and judicious author (who is ſaid to be the Rev. J. Corniſh, of Colyton, in Devon) undertakes to prove from ſcripture, "That every layman has a right not only to pray and preach in public, but alſo to adminiſter the ordinances of baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper; and that thoſe, to whom theſe offices are now committed, derive all their authority from the people who chooſe to attend upon them, and not from ordination, either by a biſhop

THE venerable ſubject of the memoir, which has given riſe to theſe remarks, expreſſes his hope,* that the doctrine of the ſoul's ſleeping till the reſurrection is as unſcriptural as it is unjoyous. The grand queſtion moſt certainly is, how far it coincides with reaſon and ſcripture, both of which, I acknowledge, appear to me to repreſent death as an abſolute ceſſation both of activity and thought. Reaſon ſeems to lead us to conclude, that, when the body dies, the man dies; that there is no more occaſion to ſuppoſe the neceſſity of any other principle than the divine energy, in order to account for the

biſhop or preſbyters; which latter notion is ſhown to be groundleſs and miſchievous." This pamphlet was publiſhed in 1775, and deſerves more attention from Proteſtant Diſſenters than they ſeem to have paid to it.

In the Theological Repoſitory, vol. V. p. 322—331, a paper was inſerted to ſhow that ordination, as conducted at preſent among Proteſtant Diſſenters, tends to countenance ſuperſtition, and particularly to keep up the erroneous and hurtful idea of poſitive rites having ſomething in them more ſacred and awful than eſſential, immutable, and everlaſting duties of religion.

* P. 82. On this point alſo Doctor PRICE appears to have thought differently from Mr. TOWGOOD. See Dr. PRIESTLEY's Funeral Sermon for Dr. PRICE.

phænomena

phænomena of the human mind, than to account for thoſe of inferior animals; that, admitting the ſuppoſition of a ſpiritual ſubſtance diſtinct from the body, ſuch ſubſtance may, equally with the body, poſſeſs ſome internal principles of decay; but even were it indiſſoluble and immortal, yet, as we are furniſhed with no evidence of the exiſtence of human ſenſation and reflection without the intervention of corporeal organs, this circumſtance would induce us to preſume, that it never actually does, or in the common order of things can, exiſt without this intervention.

With reſpect to the ſcriptures, they, we might almoſt ſay univerſally, repreſent death as a ſtate of peace, of reſt, of ſleep, of ſilence, of darkneſs, and of oblivion;† and fix our hopes or fears on the great day of retribution, when God, that quickeneth the dead, will awaken from the duſt all that are in their graves, and give to every man according to his works.

† See Appendix to Law's Theory of Religion.

And,

And, as I think what is called the doctrine of a ſleep between death and the reſurrection to be thus founded in reaſon and ſcripture, ſo I ſhall juſt mention one view of it in which it appears practically beneficial, and in which it does not ſeem to have been frequently conſidered. Good men too often repine at the miſeries and afflictions of the preſent life, and almoſt appear to think themſelves meritorious for continuing in what they are apt to call this tireſome wilderneſs, while their virtuous and valued friends, who have been ſummoned off the ſtage of mortality, are freed from the incumbrance of the body, and ranging at liberty in ſome diſtant and happy regions. The belief of no intermediate ſtate tends to remove a great deal of this diſcontent and fretfulneſs, and to reconcile them, in a great meaſure, to their actual ſituation; ſince, bad as they conſider the preſent life, it muſt, we may imagine, be thought almoſt univerſally preferable, even by themſelves, to a ſtate unjoyous and unfeeling, or, in other words, to no life at all.

But, however unjoyous, or, as is evidently meant, dejecting, the doctrine of a ſleep might appear to Mr. Towgood, as it has appeared indeed to many other wiſe and excellent men, with reſpect to myſelf, I can happily contemplate, without pain or horror, the temporary extinction of all my powers in the grave. "The flux of time ceaſes with the exerciſe of the mental faculties, and the lapſe of ages becomes no more than the tick of a watch, or the vibration of a pendulum." * As I confide in the certainty of a reſurrection, which will be to me, in effect, immediately contiguous to the moment of diſſolution, my ſentiments on the preſent ſubject would by no means prevent me, admitting the conſciouſneſs of a virtuous life, from laying down my head in the duſt with the moſt perfect compoſure, or indeed with a warm and animating rapture.

IN a paſſage before partly quoted, Mr. Towgood, we are informed, regretted the miſtaken

* Price's Sermons.

zeal

zeal by which many of the preſent day are actuated, who ſo precipitately embrace and fondly propagate opinions, which he was convinced, after long and impartial inquiry, were as unſcriptural as they were uncomfortable. But, though he lamented the efforts of thoſe who would lead others to believe their Saviour to be a mere man, he had lived long enough not to be alarmed at what he conſidered as the faſhionable ſyſtem of the day. ‡ From the conſideration of this paſſage and of our common frailty, it ſeems not improbable that Mr. Towgood might occaſionally forget his own maxim: § "Let us remember, that others may have ſearched with as much diligence and impartiality, and may, perhaps, be filled with greater light and grace of God than ourſelves;" and I cannot help thinking, he would ſcarcely have complained that the tenets of Arianiſm were too precipitately embraced, or too fondly diſſeminated, though received and diffuſed with an ardour equal to that which is manifeſted by the Socinians. It would, indeed, be extraordinary to

‡ Life, p. 86-7. § P. 186.

ſuppoſe,

ſuppoſe, that Mr. Towgood might not meet with ſome he juſtly conſidered as chargeable with temerity in the adoption of Socinian principles; for ſimilar characters are, I believe, to be found in every denomination. But it may be obſerved in general, that, with regard to the precipitancy with which any doctrines are embraced, it ought to be *generouſly* determined, not intirely, nor perhaps chiefly, by the time employed in the conſideration of them, but rather by the knowledge and ability with which they are defended. And as to the ſubject of time, it may be obſerved, that every ſucceeding year throws additional light on ſubjects of human inveſtigation. Truths, which in a former age were obſcure, and for want of a clear view and arrangement of their evidence inadmiſſible, intermediate diſcuſſion and reſearch have rendered, in the preſent, perfectly obvious and undiſputed. The exertions of learning and genius perpetually abridge and ſmooth the path to knowledge; and it is very eaſily conceivable, with reſpect to many poſitions, that to employ the ſame time in the examination of them now,

which

which was neceſſary in the preceding generation, might be juſtly conſidered as an evidence of great want of diſcernment and ability.

As it is not much to be wondered at, that men ſhould fondly propagate opinions, which they imagine (as is the caſe of the Socinians) to be of great importance, ſo it may very juſtly be queſtioned, whether, while they do it with argument and candour, it is to be regretted. I ſincerely wiſh ſuch an ardour in the cauſe of imagined truth to become univerſal, as I am convinced the cauſe of real truth would be moſt effectually advanced by it.

So difficult is it, after men have been habituated to connect pleaſurable emotions with a particular ſet of opinions, to attach ſimilar feelings to others, which are at the ſame time at leaſt equally capable of ſuch an union, that we cannot be much ſurpriſed at finding Mr. Towgood, whoſe religious hopes and joys were interwoven with Arianiſm, to have regarded the Socinian ſcheme as abſolutely uncomfortable.

I muſt, however, declare, that I not only feel it impoſſible to diſcover what there is in this ſyſtem calculated to depreſs the heart, or to caſt a ſhade over the countenance, and of which Mr. Towgood is not made to inform me in the paſſage in queſtion; but it is alſo impoſſible for me to conceive any other principles better, if equally, adapted to fill the ſoul with the moſt valuable tranquillity and chearfulneſs, to heighten the joys of proſperity, and to draw out the ſting of affliction. If, howevet, the conviction, that unerring wiſdom is our guide, and almighty power our protection; that the pardon of ſin is univerſally the effect of genuine repentance; that, if we faithfully perform the duties and bear the trials allotted us (which certainly we may do if we chooſe) all things will work together for our good, and our exertions will moſt aſſuredly be crowned with glory, honour, and immortality—if the ſcheme which contains theſe glorious principles be formed to inſpire dejection, then Socinianiſm muſt be indeed gloomy and uncomfortable.

Another

Another general, and ſuppoſed reproachful, or unfavourable, intimation is, that Socinianiſm is "the faſhionable ſyſtem of the day." Mr. Towgood doubted not but it would "ſoon vaniſh and be forgotten;" and, "that truth would finally prevail, when, wearied with controverſy, men will have recourſe to ſcripture in its plain and obvious meaning, as the only ſtandard of faith." Admitting, however, that Socinianiſm is faſhionable (and I moſt cordially wiſh it were more faſhionable than it is) this circumſtance is not abſolutely reproachful or unfriendly to it. Though error has frequently prevailed, truth has ſometimes gained the aſcendency: and, whatever may be the caſe at preſent, there was a time, not very long ſince, when Arianiſm was faſhionable, and when Mr. Towgood probably thought it rather a teſtimony than an objection to its truth, that it was ſupported by ſo many learned and diſtinguiſhed advocates. The circumſtance, however, moſt important to be mentioned, and which we ſcruple not poſitively to declare, is, that Socinianiſm, as it is called, was faſhionable in the firſt age

of

of chriſtianity, as appears both from the writings of the New Teſtament and of the orthodox fathers of the church themſelves.†

With reſpect to the indirect intimation, that Socinians do not recur to ſcripture in its plain and obvious meaning, it may not be ſuperfluous to remark, that the proper meaning of ſcripture is what the writers of ſcripture meant, which is often to be determined by local practices and particular circumſtances, and is frequently very different from what may be called its obvious meaning. This genuine ſenſe of ſcripture Socinians have perpetually endeavoured to trace through the mazes of ancient cuſtoms, minute circumſtances, and the metaphorical boldneſs of Jewiſh and eaſtern phraſeology. By this ſenſe of every text in the whole bible, which can be proved to be true, or of divine authority, they are moſt chearfully contented to abide; and more than this cannot, or moſt certainly ought not, to be required,

† See PRIESTLEY's Hiſtory of Early Opinions.

IT is with the ſincereſt pleaſure I obſerve, that Mr. Towgood, § notwithſtanding a great difference, and I might almoſt ſay an oppoſition, of ſentiment, was uſed to ſpeak of Dr. Priestley, not only as a man of great abilities, but of great integrity, as poſſeſſing at once an extraordinary genius and a benevolent and virtuous heart. Such inſtances of liberality always afford me peculiar delight; and I cannot but lament, that their uncommonneſs will ſcarcely permit me to view them without admiration. Mr. Towgood's apprehenſions, however, appear to me ſomewhat novel and ſingular, leſt the Doctor ſhould leſſen the uſefulneſs of his publications by launching too far into the regions of paradox and myſticiſm. I never could diſcover in the writings of this diſtinguiſhed philoſopher and divine any fondneſs or affectation of paradox; and as to the charge of myſticiſm, I believe Mr. Towgood ſtood quite alone. It is obſervable, that the late eminent Mr. Robinson, of Cambridge, in a letter to Dr. Priestley, writ-

§ P. 128.

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ten a very ſhort time before his death, pays him the following ‡ handſome tribute of gratitude: "I am indebted to you for the little I know of rational defenſible chriſtianity. But for your friendly aid I fear I ſhould have gone from *enthuſiaſm* to *deiſm*; but a faith founded upon evidence reſts on a rock." I cannot prevail upon myſelf to ſuppreſs the obſervation, however unimportant, that I have always admired this injured and exalted character, as an author, not only for the perſpicuity of his language, but more eſpecially for his endeavours to ſtrip the veil of myſtery or obſcurity from the various ſubjects of his diſcuſſion, and to expoſe them to the ſearching and meridian beam of reaſon.

THE power, ſays Mr. MANNING,* of clearing up all the difficulties which occur on the ſubject of the perſon and pre-exiſtence of Chriſt, will, perhaps, be vainly expected, till the

‡ Familiar Letters to the inhabitants of Birmingham, ed. 2, p. 207.

* P. 132.

mental

mental ſight ſhall be purged with the heavenly euphraſy, with which the angel in Milton removed the film from the eyes of Adam, when he ſhewed him in viſion the fate of his deſcendants. § It muſt indeed be acknowledged, that we here know, and can know, only in part. But in impreſſing this doctrine care is requiſite, leſt we induce men to ſit down contented with *unneceſſary* ignorance, and prevent their acquiſition of that knowledge, of which they are really capable. We muſt not too frequently and ſpeedily recur to the communications of a future world; and, on the preſent queſtion, I cannot help indulging more ſanguine hopes than Mr. MANNING ſeems to entertain, of the prevalence of truth in this. The evangeliſts and apoſtles do not ſeem to have thought there was any room for doubt on the ſubject, but, whatever their opinions were, to have been fully and clearly convinced of the juſtneſs of them. And (not to inſiſt on my own views of the evidence

§ If, however, notwithſtanding the diſcuſſions of learned and ingenious men on the ſubject of the pre-exiſtence, mankind be to wait for ſupernatural illumination before they can obtain a ſolid and perfectly deciſive conviction of its truth, it muſt be of little conſequence whether it be really believed at all or not.

which there is at preſent) as, by the reſearches of learned men, biblical knowledge is perpetually advancing; without dwelling on the probability, that different and valuable copies, and verſions, and writings, long buried in obſcurity, may yet be recovered, I own I think it likely, and have no doubt, that the chriſtian world, without the aid of miraculous interpoſition, will one day acquire a firm, and clear, and juſt opinion on the ſubjects above mentioned. It is, perhaps, unneceſſary to obſerve, that *a very great preponderance* of evidence tends in almoſt every caſe to annihilate remaining objections, and has nearly the ſame effect upon the mind as abſolute demonſtration.

After men have ſettled their faith in any ſyſtem, they are frequently apt to transfer thoſe ſenſations of joy which they receive from the whole to particular parts, which in themſelves are calculated to afford little or no delight. And it is upon this principle we may, perhaps, beſt account for Mr. Towgood's conſidering the doctrine of Chriſt's pre-exiſtence as not only one of the moſt evident, but moſt delightful doc-

trines

trines of the New Teſtament.* If, indeed, it be neceſſarily connected with the pardon of ſin, or everlaſting life, it may properly be conſidered in this light. But if this, I apprehend, according to Mr. Towgood's own ideas, be juſtly not ſuppoſed, I think either of the doctrines juſt mentioned, or that of an univerſal providence, or any other important doctrine of the goſpel, would be conſidered, by an unbiaſſed mind, as incomparably more delightful.

We perceive Mr. Manning and Mr. Towgood, though both undoubted believers in our Lord's pre-exiſtence, to have entertained materially different notions reſpecting the clearneſs of its evidence. The latter conſidered it as one of the moſt evident doctrines of the New Teſtament; while the former regards the diſcuſſion of this queſtion as the grand controverſy of the day, which is not likely to be brought to a ſpeedy concluſion, and, as above remarked, thinks it attended with difficulties beyond the power of human ſagacity to remove. With reſpect to Mr. Towgood's opinion on the ſubject, I would ob-

* P. 133.

 ſerve,

ſerve, that there does not appear to me any paſſage in the whole New Teſtament in which the doctrine under conſideration is plainly and clearly taught. All the evidence that can be adduced in favour of it, ſeems to be founded upon hints and alluſions, which have been imagined to refer to ſome pre-exiſtent ſtate of our Lord, without any poſitive explicit aſſertion of the fact.

When a fact is eſtabliſhed beyond contradiction, we can readily admit, that men refer or allude to it in their writings; but when there is nothing to eſtabliſh the fact beſides ſuppoſed hints and implications, the evidence muſt certainly be of a nature very queſtionable. Yet I conſider this as in reality all that the advocates of the pre-exiſtence can urge in its ſupport.

Mr. Towgood is repreſented by his biographer † as thinking there was *ample reaſon* to believe, that Jeſus Chriſt was the perſon who acted in the Shekinah, as the repreſentative of the inviſible Jehovah. This expreſſion however, is, perhaps, a little too ſtrong. For in his treatiſe of the "Grounds of Faith in Chriſt," publiſhed

† P. 133, 134.

liſhed at the age of 84, this excellent character ſpeaks of "the exalted Son of God, who had a glory with the Father before the world was, and *probably* was that brightneſs of his glory, that angel of his preſence, who appeared to Moſes in the buſh, and which led the Iſraelites through the wilderneſs and dwelt among them in the cloud of glory." The language of Mr. MANNING, and that of Mr. TOWGOOD himſelf in this paſſage, do not appear to convey preciſely the ſame idea. The former ſeems rather to imply conviction, the latter doubt. It is ſcarcely neceſſary to attempt a formal refutation of an opinion which was deemed only probable: and it will be ſufficient, with reſpect to the notion under conſideration, to obſerve, that it is indirectly, but plainly, contradicted in the firſt verſe of the epiſtle to the Hebrews, on which paſſage Mr. PIERCE remarks on the opinion we are conſidering, that "it may be queſtioned whether it has any ſolid foundation. I know not of any place of ſcripture where it is expreſſly aſſerted; and the arguments brought to prove it are ſo very ſlight, that it ſeems at beſt to be a mere conjecture." At the mention of this venerable man,

man, I feel it difficult to avoid ſuggeſting the recollection of his unmerited ſufferings, which thoſe of the inhabitants of Exeter, who have a juſt ſenſe of his great learning and integrity, will particularly and moſt ſincerely regret.

THOUGH, in the preceding remarks, I have openly oppoſed ſome of the opinions of Mr. Towgood and Mr. Manning, I certainly ſhall not attempt to vindicate thoſe injurious reflections, which the latter complains,* have been ſometimes caſt on thoſe who have embraced them. That this has been the caſe, I firmly believe, and equally lament with the reſpectable biographer: and I can add (though I am ſenſible it will only increaſe his regret) that I am able to ſympathize with him, from my own experience, that the advocates of Mr. Towgood's opinions are not the only perſons whoſe ſentiments expoſe them to unjuſt reproach. Indeed, I have no doubt, but that Socinians may claim at leaſt an equal portion of abuſe with the adherents of the Arian ſyſtem. But, however this may be, I truſt it will ever be my own practice and

* P. 143.

and that of Mr. MANNING to make the juſt diſtinction between opinions and characters, and that, while we endeavour to refute the errors of the underſtanding, we ſhall be careful, like the excellent Mr. TOWGOOD, to reſpect the virtues of the heart.

It is undoubtedly a juſt obſervation, § that Socinians do not poſſeſs advantages and means of information ſuperior to thoſe of their opponents; a ſuperiority which, to the beſt of my knowledge, they have never claimed. The ſame ſources of knowledge are evidently open to both; both have probably furniſhed advocates of equal ability; and I cannot but ſincerely wiſh, that both may continue to employ their talents and means of information in the purſuit of genuine chriſtianity. I again obſerve, that I am perfectly convinced no inconvenience upon the whole, but the moſt important benefits, will reſult from the unlimited and candid diſcuſſion of theological ſyſtems. Far be the pride and acrimony of thoſe who contend for triumph inſtead of truth! Let the ardour of diſpute never be permitted to conſume or impair the charities

§ P. 143.

charities of ſocial life, and let all endeavour to evince, that with a firm attachment to their peculiar principles they can unite the moſt enlarged and liberal feelings.

The dictates of candour and benevolence will not, I hope, appear to have been violated by the freedom of theſe remarks; and I ſhall have extremely miſtaken, if Mr. MANNING's ſhare of good ſenſe will allow him to be offended at any fair and liberal examination of opinions, which, by being voluntarily propoſed to public notice, are open to public animadverſion. Nor will the friends of Mr. TOWGOOD be diſguſted to find, that this diſtinguiſhed man is not believed to have poſſeſſed the infallibility to which he certainly never pretended. Much, and deſervedly, as they reſpect his memory, they will not ſuppoſe him to have been actually exempted from miſtakes; and they will remember, that his juſt reputation for abilities and virtue may well be ſuppoſed too powerful a ſhield for the protection of his errors.

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